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ABSTRACT

Most of the people who are involved in higher education recognize that corporate interest in developing significant, job-related educational opportunities is growing. The motivation to provide corporate educational programs ranges from the need to improve skills to an interest in responding to legal and social responsibilities by expanding employment opportunities for women and minorities. It may be useful to view this corporate interest in human resources development in light of the increased sensitivity of institutions of higher education to outreach efforts and to speculate about a number of alternative ways in which productive and mutually rewarding relationships between the two sectors may develop. These include areas such as "preparation-for-retirement" courses for employees and their spouses, career development seminars for women and minority employees, and the sharing of corporate educational resources to address social and institutional needs. In an era of stabilizing or declining enrollments, the prospect of additional, fully reimbursable programs for industrial clients may be an attractive prospect as severe financial problems are requiring institutions to make more efficient use of underutilized staff, as well as develop new sources of income. In addition, the building of bridges with the corporate sector may serve as an effective intitial outreach effort to bring adults to the campus for other programs. (Author/PG)

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HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE CORPORATE SECTOR

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Most of us in higher education recognize the corporate interest in developing significant job related educational opportunities is growing. The motivation to provide corporate educational programs ranges from the need to improve skills to an interest in responding to legal and social responsibilities by expanding employment opportunities for women and minorities. Corporations allocate substantial resources to staff development programs: IBM, for example, employed more than 3,500 full and part-time faculty who offered over 19 million hours of instruction in a recent year.[1] The Xerox Corporation (with a work force which grew from 45,000 to 75,000 in the five year period beginning in 1968) has opened an expansive corporate training facility in Leesburg, Virginia.[2] The Arthur D. Little Corporation, a management consulting firm, was recently authorized by the state of Massachusetts to grant the master's degree, while the degree granting capabilities of General Motors Institute are well established and widely recognized. The trend is so well

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advanced that additional examples are everywhere--indeed, they are the rule rather than the exception. For our purposes it may be useful to view this corporate interest in human resources development in light of the increased sensitivity of institutions of higher education to outreach efforts and to speculate about a number of alternative ways in which productive and mutually rewarding relationships between the two sectors may further develop. To be sure, a number of colleges have implemented cooperative educational programs and many serve industry either directly or indirectly through a variety of management development workshops and seminars. There are, however, other models for collaboration which may differ somewhat from the more traditional efforts. These include areas such as "preparation for retirement" courses for employees and spouses, career development seminars for women and minority employees, and the sharing of corporate educational resources to address social and institutional needs. The impetus for some of these designs is quite obvious; for others it is less so.

An aging national workforce itself suggests the number of workers normally retiring each year will increase significantly. Added to this is the current downward trend of economic indicators which will likely force workers to accept earlier retirement perhaps at the age of 55 or 60. (Already this is very much the state of affairs in other countries, most notably West Germany, where Volkswagen in particular has developed incentives to encourage early retirement, and trim its work force.) Regardless of their

age, numerous retirees cannot find viable second careers while others do not desire them. Both employees and employers are beginning to recognize the need for effective pre-retirement programs to assist retirees in adjusting to what one woman aptly described as "twice as much husband, half as much money." Organized labor groups such as the United Auto Workers, mindful of the sharp economic, social and emotional adjustments required of the retiree are beginning to negotiate for company financed pre-retirement programs. And management, recognizing that older employees facing retirement often tend to lose interest in their work, slow down production, alienate fellow workers, and become alienated themselves, has an economic if not a social interest in reducing the anxieties attending retirement. While it is true many companies have a pre-retirement program of one kind or another, most of these programs concentrate on discussions of company pension plans and Social Security regulations. It is estimated fewer than ten percent of the existing pre-retirement programs deal with the vital psychological questions of family life adjustments, health maintenance, the possible death of a spouse, and the effective use of leisure time.[3] The development of pre-retirement programs is one area which many colleges may be capable of offering service to industry.

Another area of fruitful collaboration between corporations and colleges is that of career development. Colleges may well be in a position to offer assistance in developing, implementing and evaluating employee centered career education programs, which provide participants with problem solving and communication skills.

In addition, through counseling sessions and aptitude testing, participants may come to better understand their vocational and career potentials, what is important to them, what are their skills and interests, and how to relate this information to their manager. At least one such program, designed for women and minority exempt employees, included:

> Workshops on problem solving and communication skills for both employees and managers to foster a discussion of questions related to career opportunities and personal advancement.
>
> Group counseling sessions focusing on personal interest, aptitude and potential.
>
> A career discussion program centering on aspects of personal growth and development.

Such programs, which smaller organizations are frequently unable to implement alone, can foster the development of a climate conducive to communicating problems, needs and aspirations within the organization. In addition, participants are often better able to recognize their career potential, to identify their skills and values, and to secure a better understanding of their future within the organization.

Pre-retirement and career development programs seem to benefit all parties. Follow up studies of participants in pre-retirement classes indicate the sessions were helpful in making the transition from work. Feedback on career development courses suggests the problem solving and communication skills coupled with a better self-understanding contribute significantly to job satisfaction. Corporations involved in such programs indicate they have benefited

from a more stable and productive workforce. College counselors, on the other hand, were encouraged by the ease with which they could transfer their skills to the business environment and felt such experiences aided them immensely in working with more traditional students.

In an era of stabilizing or declining enrollments the prospect of additional fully reimbursable programs for industrial clients may be an attractive prospect as severe financial problems are requiring institutions to make more efficient use of underutilized staff as well as develop new sources of income. In addition, the building of bridges with the corporate sector may serve as an effective initial outreach effort to bring adults to the campus for other programs. A word of caution is, however, in order. Prior to approaching corporations a thorough inventory of institutional capabilities is in order to insure the proper match between institutional capacity and corporate needs. A college may discover, for example, that staff members from its student affairs division, whose experience includes only work with the eighteen to twenty-two year old, need retraining themselves in order to meet the needs of older students. Staff selection and development come even more critical as colleges seek diversified expertise to meet the needs of an emerging learning society. On the other hand, as is often the case a self-inventory may identify previously unrecognized and unused resources, and many staff members welcome the opportunity to work with non-traditional students.

However, cooperative efforts need not be limited to offering programs for industry. Colleges might profitably explore means for utilizing corporate educational resources to complement their own efforts. An interesting example of this exists with a 1974-1975 National Model Project supported by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Administration on Aging, which is applying organization development (O.D.) theory and practice to improving the effectiveness of older adult organizations.[4] Developed by a New York State community college in concert with the Eastern Regional Office of General Motors Institute, Department of Organizational Development, the project called for a joint effort by both organizations and GMI, which maintained office in the campus of the grantee, would provide planning, implementation and evaluation consultation on the project. In addition the executive directors and supervisory staffs of the participating older adult organizations were to receive training along with regular General Motors managers in such areas as team building, managing professional employees, delegation and personnel appraisal. While the reduced circumstances of the auto industry ultimately prevented GMI from participating, the utilization of the substantial talent bank in corporate educational centers merits further exploration.[5] Certainly, their management expertise and recognition of corporate responsibility may make such cooperative efforts particularly attractive to smaller colleges.

The possibility also exists for sharing outside resources. Corporations often retain specialists who conduct workshops to improve

managerial skills, and college administrators faced with changing expectations and a more complex workload may find that they, too, can profit from workshops focusing on such topics as implementing MBO, supervising professional staff, developing cost benefit analyses, and long range planning.[6] While it must be kept in mind that post-secondary education is not merely another industry like General Motors, sharing the expenses of specialists with local corporations in these areas may make a great deal of sense.

In sum, current activities suggest opportunities for corporate and higher education collaboration are significant. In addition to existing efforts in cooperative education and management development, colleges of all sizes and types may find they can be of service to industry. Similarly, colleges might increase their linkages with corporate educational divisions and explore ways in which the two sectors might complement and aid each other. And, while the current economic slowdown militates against new programs, if and when present economic problems are resolved, we may find opportunities limited only by our imagination and ingenuity.

NOTES

1. Branscomb, Lewis M., and Paul C. Gilmore, "Education in Private Industry," Daedalus, Vol. II, Winter, 1975, pp. 222-223.

2. Culbertson, David J., "Corporate Role in Lifelong Learning," in Lifelong learners - A New Clientele for Higher Education, Dyckmen W. Vermilye (ed.), San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1974, pp. 29-33.

3. Sherbondy, Donald J., "Needed: New Vigor in Retirement Counseling," Personnel Administrator, January, 1975, p. 36.

4. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Human Development, Administration on Aging, 1974-1975 National Model Project, #90-A-333/01. Joseph M. Stetar, Program Director, Niagara County Community College, Sanborn, New York 14132.

5. Due to financial exigency, the East Coast Office of General Motors Institute, Department of Organizational Development totally withdrew from the program before it was fully operational. Because GMI was unable to provide any training sessions and only very limited consultation it is impossible to assess their impact.

6. Lahiti, Robert E., remarks at a workshop conducted in Niagara Falls, New York, January, 1975, for the administrative staff of Niagara County Community College.